

# Tornadoes

Tornadoes are violently rotating columns of air that descend from thunderstorm clouds to come in contact with the ground. They typically develop when the following atmospheric ingredients come together:

- warm, moist, unstable air near the surface
- strong atmospheric winds
- a nearby low pressure disturbance to lift the air and create thunderstorms

Most tornadoes in Alabama occur during the two severe weather seasons in the spring and fall. The spring severe weather season occurs in March, April, and May, while the fall severe weather season occurs in November and early December. Tornadoes typically occur during the warmest part of the day between noon and 8 pm. However, they have occurred in every hour of the day and night. Therefore, Alabamians are encouraged to be prepared at all times when there is any potential for tornadoes.

Tornadoes have wind speeds that vary from as little as 50 mph to speeds over 200 mph. They move with the thunderstorms that produce them, with forward speeds ranging from nearly stationary to 70 mph. Most tornadoes travel from the southwest toward the northeast.



F1 Tornado, (Tuscaloosa County)  
September 25, 2005  
(photo by Stephen McCloud and Heather Hope  
of Baron Services)

**Remember, tornadoes form quickly! You may have only a few seconds to react and find shelter. When a tornado threatens, your immediate action can save your life! Know what to do and where to go!**

## Safety Rules

**BE** Calm  
Smart  
Safe



### In homes or small buildings:

Go to the basement or a small interior room, such as a closet, bathroom, or interior hallway on the lowest level. Get under something sturdy like a heavy table, if available. Protect yourself from flying debris with pillows, heavy coats, blankets, or quilts. Use bicycle or motorcycle helmets to protect your head.



### Stay away from windows, doors, and outside walls!

Do not bother opening or closing windows and doors as this will not protect the structure. This will cause you to waste valuable time which may put yourself and possibly others at greater risk. Use those valuable seconds to find a place of safety. Remember to protect your head!

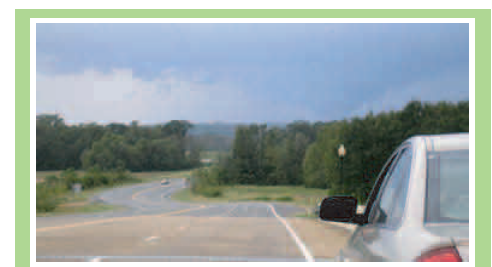
### In schools, nursing homes, hospitals, factories, and shopping centers:

Go to a pre-designated shelter area. Basements are best, but interior hallways on the lowest floor usually offer protection. Close all doors to the hallway to ensure the best protection.



### In mobile homes or vehicles:

Leave them and go to a strong building. If there is no shelter nearby, get into the nearest ditch, depression, or underground culvert and lie flat with your hands shielding your head.



Tuscaloosa County, September 25, 2005  
(photo by Stephen McCloud and Heather Hope of Baron Services)